Silberman
School of Social Work
HUNTER

THE SEE_PET - A PARTICIPATORY METHOD FOR DEVELOPING AND MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PSYCHOSOCIAL PROGRAMS

Martha Bragin, PhD

Version 2 – Generic

CUNY THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

THE SEE_PET - A PARTICIPATORY METHOD FOR DEVELOPING AND MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PSYCHOSOCIAL PROGRAMS

The SEE_PET is a rapid participatory method that can be used to develop indicators of psychosocial well-being in cultural context. The SEE_PET modifies Stepwise Ethnographic Exploration, a method based on consensus among expert practitioners, which was used successfully in this study to establish indicators of subjective well-being (Nagpal & Sell, 1986; Sell & Nagpal, 1992). Adapted to a participatory evaluation process, SEE_PET can be used to engage community members in evaluating the psychosocial components of humanitarian emergency programs designed for their benefit.

The SEE_PET is designed to be part of a baseline program assessment, to develop indicators of program effectiveness against which a program can be assessed. [1]

Preparing to start a SEE_PET exercise

The SEE_PET should be introduced to community leaders and members along with any other initial program assessments and should be accompanied by desk reviews, key informant interviews, and baseline studies to evaluate other program components.

There are two preparatory processes necessary to start a SEE_PET exercise:

1. Creating interviewing teams

The exercise can be conducted by one or more interviewing teams. The lead interviewer on each team should be someone who has experience interviewing local people and is comfortable doing so. The lead interviewer should do this exclusively and should neither take notes nor translate. The team will need one or two persons dedicated to taking notes (two is ideal). I is essential to have at least one translator on each team if there is any chance that the language of the participants will not be the same as that of the interviewer or notetaker.

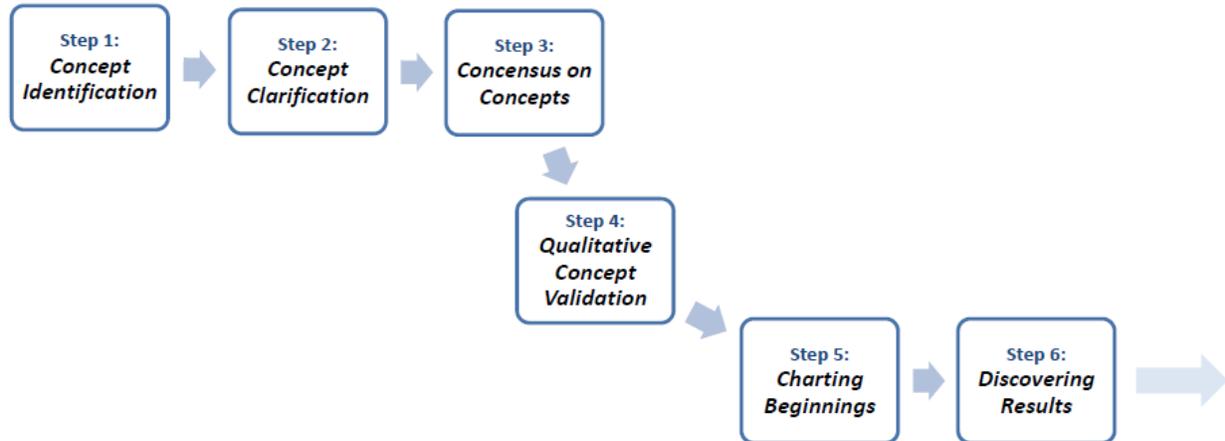### 2. Site selection, recruitment and sampling

The SEE_PET is meant to help program participants describe specific indicators of their psychosocial well-being that enable them to evaluate the effectiveness of psychosocial programs designed for their benefit. Therefore, the exercise should be carried out with potential program participants. If the program is small enough, all the participants can be involved, using existing solidarity groups. If the program is too large to include everyone, the team can use purposive sampling to create focus groups recruited from people believed to be most in need of psychosocial support. These might

---

[1] Examples in this text are taken from a participatory exercise with women in three conflict affected countries, and therefore refer mostly to the lives of women.

include survivors of violence, people who are or were associated with fighting forces, people who are disabled, widows, elderly, as well as those who have lost close family members.

The steps that comprise the SEE_PET process

The SEE _ PET process has six steps:

```
┌─────────────┐    ┌─────────────┐    ┌─────────────┐
│   Step 1:   │ ─▶ │   Step 2:   │ ─▶ │   Step 3:   │
│  Concept    │    │  Concept    │    │ Concensus on│
│Identification│    │Clarification│    │  Concepts   │
└─────────────┘    └─────────────┘    └─────────────┘
                                             │
                                             ▼
                              ┌─────────────┐
                              │   Step 4:   │
                              │ Qualitative │
                              │   Concept   │
                              │ Validation  │
                              └─────────────┘
                                      │
                                      ▼
                         ┌─────────────┐    ┌─────────────┐
                         │   Step 5:   │ ─▶ │   Step 6:   │ ─▶
                         │  Charting   │    │ Discovering │
                         │ Beginnings  │    │   Results   │
                         └─────────────┘    └─────────────┘
```

The steps move from identifying the concept – by helping participants to understand and agree upon the words that describe specific indicators – to using those indicators for a process of program monitoring and evaluation that is completely owned by the program participants.

The first four steps are part of the Stepwise Ethnographic Exploration (SEE) process:

1. Concept Identification – Initial Workshop (of staff and team)
2. Concept Clarification – Focus groups and key informant Interviews (semi-structured)
3. Consensus on Concepts – Interviewers (staff/team) meetings and workshops
4. Qualitative Concept Validation – Focus group discussions, structured/ranking

The final two steps use information gathered in steps 1-4 to create a Participatory Evaluation Tool (PET)

5. Charting beginnings – Interviewers facilitate participants to create a chart that lists their definitions of psychosocial well-being as a base against which to measure progress
6. Discovering results – Participants record progress and change course when needed

The following pages describe each of the six steps so that they can be used in the field.

Step 1: Introducing the SEE_PET: Concept Identification

Concept identification is the process of identifying the concept that you want to measure in social and cultural context. In this case it is to learn from important community leaders, members of the

organization that is conducting the program, and the team that will be conducting the SEE_PET how they understand psychosocial well-being and psychosocial programs. This will ensure that everyone involved understands "psychosocial" to mean the same thing.

The framing question

To start the process, decide on one overall framing question that will be followed by free-ranging discussion. The framing question should be a simple one, asking people to identify and define a specific concept or answer one important question. In this study the question was, "What is psychosocial well-being?" Then add questions about language to find a correct translation, such as, "What are the words that you use to express that concept?" "What are the words that people use in your local language to express that concept?" "How do you understand it in your own life?" "How do you think that program participants understand psychosocial well-being?"

The initial workshop

Begin the process with an initial workshop for community leaders, knowledgeable practitioners, interested leadership in the organization that is sponsoring the program, as well as all members of the team that will conduct the stepwise exercise in the field. This workshop will have three tasks:

1. To introduce the SEE_PET process of learning about how people understand the question at hand, and how their perceptions will serve as a baseline from which to evaluate the program;
2. To develop the framing question and build consensus within the community and the organization as to the identity of the concept;
3. To prepare members of the interviewing team for their work.

The first and last tasks can be conducted in a large group. The second task requires a small-group process (prominent community leaders may choose to leave at this point). Divide the remaining workshop participants into groups of 3 or 4 to discuss how they understand the framing question and the language they use, as well as the language used by local people, to describe the concept. Ask each group to report back to the whole workshop. After writing down the responses, brainstorm with the smaller groups to reach consensus on what questions to ask in the field, and what words to use in the initial translation.

Step 2: Concept Clarification

After the concept is identified by staff members and community leaders in an initial workshop, it should then be clarified by posing the framing question to potential program participants and selected key informants. The potential program participants should be interviewed in focus group discussions.

The focus group discussions and key informant interviews should be conducted as semi-structured interviews – that is, they will be open ended, guided only by the framing question and its modifiers.

Focus group discussions

The focus group discussions will be based on the purposive sampling of participants that was described earlier.

- ♦ **Introduce the SEE_PET exercise to participants**

Begin by informing the participants about the program being planned for their community and that a part of that program will address what is called psychosocial well-being. Tell them that the purpose of this focus group discussion is to create the indicators against which they will measure the success of the psychosocial portion of that program in order to decide whether or not the program is effective.

Always remember to inform participants, who may be quite busy, of the nature and purpose of the SEE_PET exercise. Let them know that they can leave the group whenever they wish and that they will not be quoted by name. Be certain that they understand clearly that there are no rewards for taking part in the exercise and that there are no penalties for choosing not to do so; they do not have to participate in the exercise to be part of any program now and in the future.

- ♦ **Start with orienting questions**

The questions below are introductory, just to learn about the participants and their community life.

- ▪ Describe your community.
  - o Tell us a bit about this place. What is it like here (climate, culture, special characteristics, etc.)?
  - o What does a person (man, woman, boy, girl) do here from morning till night?
  - o What is it that you like best about this place? Least? What would you like to change?

- ♦ **Ask the framing question and use some additional questions to help with clarification**

- ▪ What does it mean for a person to be really well psychologically and socially (use the language that was chosen in the initial workshop)?
- ▪ Do you know someone who is really well? How do you know that person is well?
- ▪ If this small baby is grown up to be your age, and they are really well at heart, what will their life be like?

Raise the questions discussed in the first workshop and see what happens. Make space for everyone to talk and try to discourage self-appointed "spokespersons" from emerging. Keep asking questions until you get a rich array of answers from many participants. The box below gives concrete examples of how this study tested the questions in two countries – Burundi and Northern Uganda. The examples illustrate how a question may be useful in one context, but have to be modified in another.

In Burundi, in the first focus groups questions about positive experiences in life or examples of people who were well in their hearts yielded silence or one-word answers. When the team members noticed the attention the participants were paying to the babies in their arms they switched to the questions about what it might be like if a small child grew up and was well they got much more positive answers. The focus group kept talking for a long time with many of the participants interrupting the others, eager to build on the concept.

But in Uganda, the reverse was true. When the team asked the participants the very same question, about the babies in their arms, those participants responded with brief answers " The child will be obedient." " the child will grow up and work hard." However, in asking about possible words that indicated that a person was well at heart a rich array of language, coupled with specific experiences, poured out and complex discussion followed.

Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews support concept clarification. Ask the participants whom they think should be included to help explain ideas of well-being in the context of their culture – for example, midwifes, religious leaders, teachers, traditional healers, community leaders or other persons they consider experts. Such community leaders can provide context to the information coming from the participants and introduce new factors that were not readily seen or already discussed but may be known to cultural, religious or community leaders. Utilizing those people who were recommended by the participants in the groups can further clarify what the participants are saying.

Key informant interviews can be interspersed with the focus groups, precede or follow them to support concept clarification.

- ♦ Questions you might ask key informants:
    - What is your role in the community?
        - o How does your role relate to the people in the community?
    - How would you define psychosocial well-being (use the language you agreed upon in the initial workshop)?
        - o What language would you use to describe this state of being?

- What questions should we ask the people whose lives you know about to help them define psychosocial well-being?
- What would you like to tell us that we did not ask?

Peer debriefing: nightly interviewers meetings

Each evening, following the focus group discussions and key informant interviews, the interviewing team members meet to discuss the day's results and to consider any issues that might have arisen. They review the work of the note taker to ensure that there is consensus about to what has been said.

Step 3: Consensus on Concepts

At the conclusion of the exercise, when saturation has been reached or when all program participants have been part of the discussions, the interviewers hold a workshop to review and code their findings. The workshop should include the program's psychosocial advisor if that person is available and was not part of the interviewing team. Team members review the notes and write the ideas that have been expressed on a flip chart, and then count the number of focus groups in which an idea is mentioned to determine its importance. If one person mentions something that is never referred to again that idea goes on a list of "outliers" that may be revived during the next phase. Ideas are then grouped by large categories or domains, and the examples or subcategories that clarify the domains in practical terms are operationalized. See the text box below for an example from Nepal.

In Nepal, participants talked a lot, in every focus group, about the importance of being able to move about freely, or simply "going somewhere." Some of the participants mentioned that the interviewers had travelled to visit them, and they wanted to visit anyone that they pleased. Others talked specifically about meeting their own mother or going to the Village Development Committee. Therefore the research team categorized "Freedom of Movement" as a domain, and listed what "Freedom of Movement" meant in practical terms below.

- **Freedom of Movement (domain)**
  - I can go to see my mother at festival times.
  - I can travel to the VDC to advocate for my needs
  - I am free to go anywhere for any reason, without anyone speaking ill of me

---

Step 4: Qualitative Concept Validation[2]

The purpose of Step 4 is to ensure that the interviewers understood correctly what the participants said in order to set the stage for the participatory evaluation process. While the SEE is a consensus methodology of experts, the SEE_PET places emphasis on the role of the program participants. They develop the initial ideas, review the results of the exercise and give their opinions. This degree of group member checking ensures that the resulting indicators can be trusted to reflect the ideas of the participants. Therefore the process has two parts: 1) structured focus group discussions, and 2) participatory ranking.

To prepare for this part of the exercise, the interviewing team brings pictures that represent the main domains so that they can be referred to by the group members without requiring them to be literate. Pictures do not have to be complete, just illustrative. Photographs, newspaper advertisements or archives from program materials can be used.

Structured focus group discussions

Reconvene the focus groups and remind members of the purpose of the exercise, what has gone before, and that they are free to leave at any time. Report on the results of the interviewers' workshop. Hold up a picture representing each domain and list the ways that it is operationalized (for example, in Nepal, "Freedom of Movement" was represented by pictures of people walking, in a bus, on bicycles and one on a motorcycle [which drew smiles]). Ask the participants whether they agree or not that the picture represents an aspect of psychosocial well-being. Then list the specific activities that they have reported to operationalize the domain (for example, in Nepal, the interviewer pointed to parts of the picture and said, "visiting mother at festival times," "going to the Village Development Committee to advocate for my needs," and finally "going wherever I would like, whenever I would like without anyone speaking ill of me"). After each example, the interviewer asks, "Is this correct? Do you wish to add anything? Did you want to take anything away?"

After going through this procedure with all the large categories, ask participants if they wish to add another domain, or if any should be subtracted. This will take a bit of time for discussion and decisions.

The participatory ranking exercise

Domains of psychosocial well-being tend to be interrelated, or part of a constellation that must be experienced as a whole according to literature and the participants in this study (Nussbaum, 2003;

---

[2] This is sometimes called "member checking" (Padgett, 2008), especially in the United States, or "respondent validation" (Barbour, 2001).

Psychosocial Working Group, 2003; Ungar, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of the ranking exercise is not to rate the comparative importance of any one indicator over another. Rather, its purpose is to ensure that all participants in the exercise take time to consider the indicators one at a time, which will increase confidence in their trustworthiness. Ask each focus group to stand up and "vote" for, eliminate, or change each of the domains.

After each focus group reviews the individual domains and subcategories, the interviewers hold up the picture that was used to illustrate each domain and again repeat the subcategories participants used to operationalize each domain. The interviewers ask the participants which they would choose if only one domain were possible and then to line up behind the picture that represents their first choice. The picture with the most votes gets the rank of (1). Then interviewers should follow the same procedure with each domain until the participants rank or discard them, one at a time. The text box below provides an example from Burundi used in this study.

From Burundi: "Please look at the pictures. If our small child over there were to be grown, and that child could have only one of these elements of *Kumererwa-neza*, only one, which would you choose for them? Please stand behind the one you would choose if you were forced to do so? (After some time when all of the participants have chosen, you can ask the next question.) Now we will give that child only the one that you have chosen. Now if that child were to have only one more, then please choose what you would add. Take your time and choose." The process continued until all of the domains were completed. In some groups the participants eliminated one domain. In other groups they added. They are free to do this.

At the conclusion of participatory ranking exercise, the interviewers again explain the purpose of the exercise to be sure that everyone in the group has agreed on the constellation of domains that comprise well-being so that the program can now use them as a basis of evaluation.

Step 5: Charting Beginnings

To begin the evaluation system in a follow-up meeting, assist the participants to talk about each item listed on the chart and how they would operationalize it. Use the domains that they selected to set up a chart to note progress. The left-hand column of the chart should contain the domains that the participants have established and agreed upon. The next column lists the ways in which each domain is operationalized in action. The participants then report on each of the ways in which each domain is operationalized, and the psychosocial focal person or group leader marks the agreed-upon response on the chart next to each domain. This will form the "baseline" against which the participants will measure the success of their program. Because the baseline will be particular to each group, its standards should be written based on the domains agreed upon by each group. The chart below from this study uses examples from communities in Northern Uganda, Burundi and Nepal for illustration.

The SEE_PET

Domain	Operational Definition	Right now	After 4 months	After 8 months	After 1 year
Education (PICTURE)	I have access to important information All of my children are at school	We feel ignorant of important information The younger children from 5 of the families attend school			
Access to resources (PICTURE)	I can help decide how to spend money in the household I can get help in emergencies I can save for things that I want	We do not have access even to the money we earn from daily wages The clan decides about support, sometimes they don't give No Group Savings Program			
Harmony and Love in the family (PICTURE)	I feel safe in my home My husband loves me I am welcome to live in my home even if I am a widow	Some of us are beaten We have fights that cause us distress Our family members tell us to leave			
Friends and support outside the family (PICTURE)	When we are sad we can talk to friends We have a place to turn when bad things happen at home	Sometimes we feel hopeless & sad We meet friends when we go for water or daily work			
Voice at home community and beyond (PICTURE)	I can speak in my family and people listen I attend community meetings	We don't speak at home We don't attend community meetings We have no voice			

You can assist the group to address the specific problems exposed by the baseline in a small way, so that participants know that they are moving closer toward their goal of well-being in each

domain. Determine the time intervals at which you will measure progress (don't make them too short, or no progress will be recorded; don't make them too long or the participants may forget). A process you might follow is to set small goals for the quarter. For example, establish regular meetings and make certain that everyone attends, bring an advisor to the meeting to discuss how to solve one of the problems on the list, check in with each member at each meeting so that no one feels alone, and each can both give and receive support.

Step 6: Discovering Results: Using the Evaluation System

During the next months the group will implement the plan made at the first meeting of staff and leaders. Each evaluation period offers a chance to learn if the program is working and to make changes and improvements where necessary. Bring the chart to the evaluation meeting and fix it to an object so that it is easily visible.

Point to the picture next to each domain and review the ways in which the group had operationalized it. Read aloud the baseline results. Ask what changes the group has made and record them on the chart. The chart below illustrates a filled-in progress chart that could have resulted from such a discussion at the four-month interval.

Domain	Operational Definition	Right now	After 4 Months	After 8 Months	After 1 Year
Education (PICTURE)	I have access to important information All of my children are at school I learn new things all of the time	We feel ignorant of important information The younger children from 5 of the families attend school	We have a meeting once a month where someone comes to bring us new information We have a common fund to pay school fees		
Access to resources (PICTURE)	I can help decide how to spend money in the household I can get help in emergencies I can save for things that I want	We do not have access even to the money we earn from daily wages The clan decides about support, sometimes they don't give	We have begun a group savings program We have visited the families at home and asked that husbands allow their wives to put in a coin		

		No group savings program	We are discussing other ways to access resources		
Harmony and Love in the family (PICTURE)	I feel safe in my home My husband loves me I am welcome to live in my home even if I am a widow	Some of us are beaten We have fights that cause us distress Our family members tell us to leave	We have learned about conflict mediation in our group: we use this to support families NGO led an "end domestic violence" workshop for men		
Friends and support outside the family (PICTURE)	When we are sad we can talk to friends We have a place to turn when bad things happen at home	Sometimes we feel hopeless & sad We meet friends when we go for water or daily work	We meet every two weeks and when a member is missing we check on that person We listen to one another's problems in the group		
Voice at home community and beyond (PICTURE)	I can speak in my family and people listen I attend community meetings	We don't speak at home We don't attend community meetings We have no voice	Each person says their name at each meeting We go to important meetings together		

After charting the results, the participants can evaluate for themselves whether the group is "on the right track." Are the actions they are taking really improving their sense of psychosocial well-being? Are they really beginning to experience greater well-being? Are these changes having some negative effects on their well-being? If so can they be corrected?

Following the evaluation, the participants can plan the activities they would like to see continue as they move forward. They can also note any changes they would like to make. These changes (sometimes called "course correction") should be reflected in the charts. At the end of the program, include the progress and changes recorded in the charts in the qualitative section of the final program evaluation.